1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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THE VILLAGE SETTING

life of the villagers—religion. Next to the mosques in appearance and cleanliness are some of the shops and stores. These must have a minimum standard of building requirements, according to official regulations. On the north side of the village stand the police station, the post office and the elementary school. As to the fields, they extend to the west of the railway road up to the Nile bank, where the water-pumping works, established in 1932, stands with its modern buildings and garden and electric light.

It is worth mentioning here that each of the ten villages constituting the administrative unit of Silwa has its own name and is separated from its neighbours, however close these may be, by a recognized boundary, e.g. a high mound, a valley, or a stretch of gravel or sand. Each of these villages (or two villages combined, as in the case of four of the villages) has its mosque and village saint tomb with a cemetery attached to it. In spite of the fact that all the villages attached to Silwa trace their origin to one ancestor, as will be discussed later, their spatial separation is associated with sub-divisions in their kinship relations.

The physical characteristics of the inhabitants of these villages show a considerable degree of homogeneity. With their dark skins and long heads, they seem to conform to the ancient Southern Egyptian type.[1] All the inhabitants of Silwa, however, take great pride in describing themselves as descendants of Arab stock related to the Prophet. They refer to their traditions and customs and even their dress as 'Arabian'. Whether their claim is true or not, the belief is of central importance as one of the cohesive forces in the village community, and it is the means by which the villagers, especially the older generation, distinguish their way of life from that of others.[2]

The rhythm of daily life in Silwa hardly varies. The crack of dawn witnesses the muazzin calling for morning prayers; youths and men, mounted on their donkeys or camels, call on each other to climb the hills to fetch the fertilizer. By sunrise, most men and boys are heading towards the fields with their cattle and tools; and by broad daylight the village seems

[1] A. Batrawi, who has studied the physical anthropology of Egyptians, maintains that there is some justification for the usual division of Egypt into Upper and Lower Regions as far as the cephalic index is concerned. The people of Upper Egypt have longer but narrower heads, and longer fingers, feet and forearms than those of Lower Egypt. His study of the living samples of modern Egyptian population from all over Egypt suggests that they conform more closely to the Ancient Southern type. Moreover, the distribution of blood groups in present-day Egypt shows that the mass of the population is very homogeneous and there are no significant differences in this respect between the Moslems and the Copts. 'The Racial History of Egypt, Part II—Relationships of the Ancient and Modern Population of Egypt and Nubia', in *Journal of Anthropological Institute*, Vol. LXXVI, 1946, pp. 131–55.

[2] Arab genealogies must be accepted with great caution. The notion of the Arabs as a conquering race, known for their gallantry, honour and power, played effectively on the minds of the indigenous stock of the fellaheen, who showed an earnest desire to be considered members of that race. Many fellaheen have succeeded in linking themselves to an Arab tribe. A. Ammar, *The People of Sharqiya* (Ph.D. thesis, Manchester University), pp. 13–21.

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and social exchange. Each of the two sections is supposed to be characterized by certain attributes; the Muniab being renowned for their boasting and self-pride, and heavy-built members, while the 'Onab are reputed to be comparatively stingy and much inclined to gossip. 616

There are no formal heads of clans but there are natural leaders who are spontaneously appointed on occasions from the oldest members. The distinctive hallmark of every clan is its guest house, where the adult members of the clan have their communal meals during the fasting month of Ramadan, receive a common guest, settle disputes, meet for ordinary gossip and can celebrate their feasts, ceremonies and funerals. On one hand, the clans are aware of their integral identity; and on the other hand, they are aware that they are linked together by a common ancestor forming the unity of the village. 613

Silwa Kibli (Southern Silwa) and its neighbouring villages are inhabited by the descendants of 'Ayyash the third brother of 'On and Musa. This genealogical relationship is the explanation given to the similarities in customs and traditions between the two parts of Silwa Kibli and Silwa Bahari. 619 63 84 829

The genealogical pattern goes on to repeat itself still further to include and explain the relations and similarities in the larger socio-geographic region extending throughout the whole province. Apart from the towns 'where people are mixed', most of the villages of this region are inhabited by either the G'afra or 'Ababda. While the G'afra are the descendants of G'afar al-Sadik whose great-grandfather was the grandson of the Prophet, the 'Ababda are the descendants of 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubair who belonged to the Kuraish clan, the Prophet's clan, but was not so close in kinship or favour to the Prophet. The G'afra consider themselves more hospitable than the 'Ababda; and they are also distinguishable as farmers, while the 'Ababda, even if they are farmers at present, were originally camel-drivers.

Moreover the G'afra region is divided into two parts: those villages lying along the eastern bank of the Nile are descendants of Bahr (amongst whose sons were 'On, Musa and 'Ayyash), while those stretching along the western bank of the Nile are the descendants of Buhair, the brother of Bahr. The diagram overleaf represents the ramification of kinship in the region of G'afra and Silwa. 361

It is clear from this that not only the village, but the whole region represents a ramified genealogical tree, having one main trunk. It is also significant that this ramification is related to the branching off of brothers who were not in agreement, e.g. in the division of East and West in the whole region, in the division of the two parts of Silwa (South and North) and in the division of Silwa itself into two sections. This could be taken as a recognition of a deep-seated cultural expectation of brothers' discord, in spite of the highly idealized expectation of fraternal solidarity. 593

The genealogical pattern, based on the unilateral descent, repeats itself

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FOLK LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

community marked with the lowest degree of isolation and homogeneity was characterized by the highest degree of individualization, secularization, and disorganization, and conversely.[1]

This hypothesis of the historical phases of culture change has stimulated other anthropologists to test it. Sol Tax, examining the hypothesis in the light of his Guatemalan data, was led to make a distinction between two aspects of culture that would cut across Redfield's framework. With regard to the world view and the beliefs about nature and man, the Guatemalan Indians are of the primitive type, while in their kind of social relations they are of the civilized type. He maintains that the interrelationships of the folk-life characteristics as found in Yucatan do not necessarily repeat themselves in every folk society. The Guatemalan Indians, unsophisticated, homogeneous in beliefs and practices, are mobile, having relationships of the impersonal type, with formal institutions dictating the acts of individuals, with familial organization weak, and with life secularized.[2]

It was also pointed out that Max Weber has shown how capitalistic commercialism could, and did, go hand in hand with piety in the case of the Protestants and the Puritans. Under certain conditions of literate, and at least partly urbanized, society, a culture may be both highly commercial and sacred as in the case of the Jewish history.[3]

In the light of these findings, Silwa community fits rather with Redfield's characteristics of the folk society. Silwa is a comparatively isolated community, as it lies at a distance of about thirty miles from both Edfu and Kom Ombo, the nearest urban centres to the north and south respectively, while more than seven hundred miles separates it from Cairo. On the other hand, it is less isolated than other village communities in the sense that there is a Post Office, a Railway Station (at which express trains do not stop), as well as a Police Station. It is also less isolated in that it has a weekly market, to which people from surrounding villages and traders from nearby towns come to buy and sell their goods.

The villagers are, on the whole, relatively immobile, a phenomenon that makes face to face relationships loom large in the folk society. The attachment to their locality is also associated with a sectional pride in their origin, which embraces the various villages of G'afra, and explains to them the differences between their customs and traditions and those of other regions. The villagers refer to themselves as well as to other Moslems by the term 'nation of Moslems' (ummat-al-muslimeen), and feel that they are Arabs first and foremost. One occasionally sees pictures of Imam Ali and his sons, Hasan and Hussein, Abu-zeid-al-Hilali, decorating some houses, especially of newly married couples. For the villagers, the world is

[1] Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, pp. 360, 362.
[2] Sol Tax, 'World View and Social Relations in Guatemala', in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XLIII, 1941, pp. 27–40.
[3] Robert Redfield, 'The Folk Society', in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. LII, 1947, p. 308.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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to be specialists in transmitting to others the religious knowledge of the Holy Book and the pious ancestors. The oral means of communicating and committing to memory the accumulated experiences is the best guide for perpetuating the group's tradition. It is not surprising, then, that old people are considered as knowing more than the young, and that, on these grounds, they are worthy of respect and obedience. The young have to wait many years before they can wield the same prestige and authority, for the instruments of wisdom may only be acquired through the passage of time. It is not unusual to hear people who wish to assert their position or to impress others with their views saying: 'I am a man who has witnessed both the pre-Islamic (jahiliya) and Islamic eras.'[1]

Good memory is certainly a great asset and indeed highly valued in Silwa, and the person with a good memory is usually described as the one with 'the full head'. The ability to remember names, places, events, and genealogies enhances the person's popularity and makes his participation and consultation desirable in social activities. The emphasis on memory training is impressed on the child as early as its efforts to learn to talk. Mothers utter a few words for the child to repeat, and then ask it to go round to all those who may be present, and say these words to each in turn, and this is recognized as the best method for the teaching of language. One of the favourite amusements of adults with children is to test the latter in reciting the names of their families in genealogical order. Very frequently, however, the adults may purposely interject incorrect names to mislead the children. Some children between the age of three and four, on being asked by the writer to recite their family names, would tell him as many as four or five of their names (the first name, followed by the father's name, the grandfather's, the great-grandfather's and so on).[2] In a symbolical way, the mother encourages the child to eat pigeon's head, as it is believed that this will foster the child's alertness of memory in later years of life.

It would be very difficult to determine here to what extent the importance laid on memory and memorization has been the product of the Islamic view of learning. It should be mentioned, however, in this connection that knowledge, for the Moslem scholars, was not so much a reaching out to the unknown (research), as it was a mechanical process of amassing the 'known'; the known being eternal and given, is unchangeable. Thus the acquisition of information and the deduction from accepted premises were the most important methods of knowledge.[3] A learned man

[1] This is, of course, an artificial claim such as the English expression, 'I don't know him from Adam'. The historical sense amongst the villagers, especially the older generation, is mainly thought of in the partition between the two eras, the pre-Islamic and the Islamic.

[2] It must be pointed out that in Silwa, or for that matter in Egypt as a whole, there is no system of first names and surnames. In Silwa, every person is always called by his first name. Unfamiliarity or respect requires only the addition of the title 'sheikh' in front of the first name.

[3] H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, pp. 64–6.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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Upper Egypt

CHAPTER VIII

INTER-VILLAGE FIGHTS. THE LAW OF REVENGE

THE Egyptian *felläḥīn* are by no means a military people, but in their inter-village fights, which are not of infrequent occurrence, they sometimes display a quite surprising ferocity. It must be remembered that to the Egyptian peasant his own village is the centre of the universe, and people of other villages, though treated with hospitality and courtesy as visitors, are, in some cases, looked upon with as much suspicion as if they were positive aliens. As will be seen later on, hostilities between adjacent villages were no less a marked feature of Egyptian life in antiquity than at the present day.

The inhabitants of some mutually hostile villages hardly ever meet without at least attempting to pick a quarrel, and I have been myself a spectator of such conflicts on more than one occasion. In most parts of the world it is usually found that the market-place is neutral ground, and that there even the most antagonistic peoples will meet unarmed. In some parts of Egypt, however, not only is the market-place the site regularly chosen for village conflicts, but fights which take place there are by no means confined to non-market-days! Various weapons (Figs. 57 and 58) are used at these inter-village encounters. The commonest are the *nabbūt* (a very stout single-stick), a primitive type of spear, and a battleaxe. The spear consists of a long wooden shaft terminating in a slender iron point or in a plain or barbed leaf-shaped blade. The axe is a long pole surmounted by a winged iron head. Stones too are used, and are thrown with deadly effect.

The first battle of this kind that I witnessed took place in connexion with the sinking of a large boat in a canal, the muddy bottom of which held it fast. An attempt had to be made to raise the vessel, to which two strong ropes were attached by divers. Large crowds had collected on either side of the canal, and the services of some of these people were enlisted in the efforts to raise the boat, but most of them, like myself, were mere spectators.